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**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FILE: B-201429

DATE: December 30, 1980

MATTER OF: Office Of United States  
Trade Representative

*DLG 04742*

**DIGEST:**

Use of travel agent to arrange group travel for Government sponsored investment mission to Israel is approved where agency indicates prior to travel that use of travel agent is both practical and economical to the Government, that it will not interfere with performance of official business, and will involve use of reduced fares which will result in monetary savings to the Government.

*[Request for*

The Director-Management of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) requests that we grant a waiver of the prohibition against the use of commercial travel agents, 4 Code of Federal Regulations 52.3 (1980), so that a travel agent can be used to make the necessary travel arrangements for the USTR sponsored Investment Mission to Israel in February 1981. The USTR has responsibility for organizing the mission and arranging travel reservation and lodging accommodations for approximately 15 private sector mission participants and three Government officials. According to USTR's letter, it is unable to provide these services, and the travel for the mission will "require greater resources than are currently available to this office." Although USTR spends approximately \$500,000 on travel yearly it has no travel service unit or specialist to handle personnel travel needs.

USTR advises us that the travel expenses for all participants including the three Government officials will be paid from mission application fees with the possible exception of per diem for the Government officials paid from Government funds. USTR has informally consulted with a travel agent who has offered to make all the necessary group travel arrangements including the use of reduced excursion fares booked in advance without charge to the Government.

With respect to civilian employees of the United States, paragraph 1-3.4(b) of the Federal Travel

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Regulations (FTR) authorizes use of a travel agent under limited circumstances. See ✓47 Comp. Gen. 204 (1967); ✓B-201258, December 10, 1980; ✓B-103315, August 9, 1978. The provision enables the Government to take advantage of reduced fares offered by the carriers and by the travel agents. Subparagraph (1) provides for the use of the lower fares offered by the carriers when it can be determined prior to the start of the trip that such services are practical and economical to the Government. Subparagraph (2) authorizes the use of group or charter fares sold by travel agents when such use will not interfere with the performance of official business. However, an administrative determination is required prior to the travel that the use of the reduced fares will result in a monetary savings to the Government, and will not interfere with the conduct of official business.

USTR's letter indicates that USTR has made determinations which support the granting of an exception under ✓FTR para. 1-3.4(b). With regard to this investment mission to Israel, the letter indicates USTR's belief that the use of a travel agent is both practical and economical to the Government. It is also clear that the use of the travel agent will not interfere with the performance of official business, but rather aid the USTR in carrying out its responsibilities to organize and service the travel needs of the mission. USTR has also informally advised us that the use of reduced fares will result in monetary savings to the Government.

Under these circumstances prior approval to use a travel agent to arrange the travel for this investment mission to Israel is granted. ✓47 Comp. Gen. 204 (1967); ✓B-201258, December 10, 1980; ✓B-103315, August 9, 1978.

*Milton J. Fowler*

Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States